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STATE FOR NEA/MAG AND IO/UNP

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SUBJECT: MOROCCAN FM SPEAKS WELL OF VAN WALSUM TO S/CT
DAILEY AND DAS GRAY

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri was cautiously positive on the Western Sahara peace process during a February 8 meeting with S/CT Dailey and NEA DAS Gray. Fassi Fihri was upbeat on Van Walsum, who recently told him he hoped for a solution based on non-independence, but still needed a UNSC mandate to push this in the Manhasset talks. The Foreign Minister remained worried about Polisario threats to return to the battlefield, which, if implemented could turn into a regional catastrophe. He expressed concern that Van Walsum was under pressure in the UN Secretariat. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In the February 8 meeting, also devoted to other subjects (septels), the FM expressed appreciation for his meetings the previous week with the Secretary and Undersecretary Burns. Our relationship is good, he said, and he appreciated U.S. efforts to support the AMU. The Maghreb region can work together, as shown in January meetings the Foreign Ministers had with their European counterparts. Algeria remains an obstacle, he said.

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¶3. (C) Fassi Fihri indicated that UNSYG Personal Representative for Western Sahara Peter Van Walsum had left the GOM with a more positive impression in the course of his just-completed visit, which was Van Walsum's first since the beginning of the re-started process of negotiations. Van Walsum had told the Moroccans that the fourth round of Manhasset talks, coming March 11-13, should be different than the previous three. The Minister hoped the UN envoy had a better vision of his duties than in the past.

¶4. (C) Fassi Fihri said Van Walsum told the GOM he would deliver a strong message in Algiers and Tindouf to get serious on the negotiations. Van Walsum conveyed his belief it would be necessary to combine principles with the reality that an independent state is not possible in the Western Sahara. While this may not result in substantial progress in the fourth round, then, Van Walsum said, he would try to express his views in the report to the Security Council. Then it will be up to the Council to authorize an abrupt change in the negotiations to focus them on the Moroccan proposal, a mandate he did not have now. If not, Van Walsum

had mused, it could mean the end of his mission, in which he was hoping to build agreement on the basis of a non-independent state.

¶15. (C) Fassi Fihri said he told Van Walsum that he needed to be more courageous both in Manhasset and in public about pushing the non-independence solution he said he favored. The GOM believed he already had a UNSC mandate to concentrate on the Moroccan proposal, due to the second UNSCR's mention of recent "developments," which could only refer to the Moroccan plan. Autonomy is important, he said, but the content has to be negotiated, and Morocco he stressed remained flexible. If Van Walsum proceeds as outlined and the UNSC does not agree, it would mean all the Moroccan work was for naught. Fassi Fihri stressed that the proposal was negotiable but that sovereignty was not.

¶16. (C) He said he urged Van Walsum to press the Algerians on the recent Polisario threats to resume armed conflict and recent statements that they would be developing and returning civilians to the territory east of the berm. Van Walsum said he would. There was a real risk, the FM said, of regional catastrophe if the Polisario returns to arms. If they try to attack, or even to supply the so-called buffer zone, they will be forced to go through Northern Mauritania, as they had in the past. Any such actions would force Morocco to react strongly.

¶17. (C) Fassi Fihri disclosed that the GOM had heard in New York that SYG Ban Ki-Moon's 38th floor staff was calling a meeting of the "political committee" to discuss, for the first time, how the UN was organizationally handling the Western Sahara dispute. The GOM understood there was internal pressure to change the Personal Representative, suggesting that this might be fed by SRSR Harston in

Laayoune. The GOM was unhappy with Harston, who had recently sent an apology to the Polisario for some damage to monuments caused by MINURSO troops. Fassi Fihri said he understood Van Walsum would be stopping back home in the Netherlands after Nouakchott; he would then go to Paris before heading to New York.

¶18. (C) Gray noted that the USG has been clear to Algeria, and in its contacts at lower levels, with the Polisario, that it was time to get serious in the negotiations and the talk of a return to conflict was not acceptable. The USG was in an information gathering mode, but we had seen nothing so far on the ground that would indicate trouble.

¶19. (C) Comment: Fassi Fihri appeared to be more supportive of Van Walsum than in the past, and as a result somewhat more optimistic about the UN process. Moroccan concerns about Polisario threats to go back to war and develop the trans-berm area, which Fassi Fihri had earlier articulated in his meeting with the Secretary and others, are deeply felt. We may do well to continue conveying our objections to the military threats. End Comment.

¶10. (U) DAS Gray has cleared this message.

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Riley